

## **INQUIRY INTO TEACHER SHORTAGES IN NEW SOUTH WALES**

**Name:** Ms Rebecca Smiley

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I am writing to you to inform you of the emotional, social, mental, physical and financial stress I am under due to mandatory vaccinations for teachers. I have been a teacher for 21 years in Australia and also in India where I lived for 6 years and I love teaching. I have been a classroom teacher in 5 primary schools on the Central Coast for the last 21 years. In addition I have trained in and taught Reading Recovery, L3 (Literacy program); coordinated and conducted school, Koori Choir and Choral Festival choirs; coordinated Aboriginal cultural experiences for schools; coordinated dance groups and trained and coordinated school cricket and basketball teams. Being at the top of my professional teaching career it's upsetting that the NSW Department of Education are talking about replacing teachers by employing university students, volunteer parents and teachers from overseas. The NSW Department of Education has told me that I cannot set foot in a school, let alone teach my students unless I am vaccinated. By not getting vaccinated, the NSW Department of Education said

- I would be referred to the Professional and Ethical Standards directorate and be investigated for misconduct and non-compliance.
- I would not be able to teach in any schools.
- I would be reported to the NSW Police if I attempt to enter the school premises.
- My contract will be cancelled and my casual approval will be withdrawn.

I am very stressed from this DET correspondence and any dealings I have had with the Department of Education. Even writing this email to you, I feel agitated and sick in the stomach and on the verge of tears. Since the announcement that it would be mandatory for teachers to be vaccinated I have been incredibly stressed and anxious. I have been through some tough times in my life but I can't remember a time I have been so affected. I am having sleepless nights, I have lost 3 kilos, I am having trouble thinking straight and concentrating. I am worried about how I will pay my mortgage and put food on the table. Instead of a society in which personal choice should be encouraged I have been subjected to harassment by people I considered close friends. This has been very distressing.

On May 10, I received a phone call from my assistant principal at Terrigal PS to offer me my job back (which I had held at TPS since 2018). On May 11, all DET staff received an email from Georgina Harrison (Secretary DET) stating that the requirement for all staff to be double vaccinated remains in place. A few days ago I heard that the position that was offered to me, has been given to a fourth year university student who has not completed her training or had any experience. I have written to the premier who has forwarded my email to the DET, who in turn have written back an unsigned, generic response. The response hides behind remnants of the previous covid mandated health order restrictions, which ended on May 13, 2022. The obfuscating response also talks about a review. This is despite the fact that the rest of society is back to pre-covid normality excluding medical facilities and schools.

In South Australia and in recent days Victoria, all public school staff are back to work, so is Western Australia with all traces of vaccine requirements having been expunged from their DET computer systems. I wonder what the difference is between NSW and the other states of Victoria, SA and WA. Given NSW is the engine of the Australian economy we need to be allowed back to work. It's hard to understand why teachers like myself who has over 21 years experience are being prevented from participating in the education system which is currently in a government made staffing crisis. This only adds to further hurting the children and the wider community. NSW Schools staffing issues are in the media daily combined with the premier's decision to extend school by an extra year. This will only further exacerbate the current staffing situations.

Schools are in crisis. Some of the disturbing situations I have heard of are classes being split, classes having no teacher and having to occupy themselves in playgrounds, hallways and libraries, learning support teachers not able to perform their role of working with the most vulnerable students as

they are teaching other classes. Whole grades of students, being sent home for weeks and teachers being asked to lie to the parents that there is a covid outbreak, when in reality it's because they cannot find teachers.

I am in contact with many other teachers. They report it has never been such a difficult, stressful time. In fact some of the older teachers have suggested that I not to return to teaching in it's current state. I have been living off my savings, holding out hope that I will be able to go back to work. I was looking forward to continuing teaching and using my expertise and knowledge to educate many more children for at least another 10 years. However I'm becoming increasingly despondent that I may have to choose a new career path due to what now appears to be increasingly obvious callousness towards the teaching professionals.

The children who are the future of Australia have lost valuable teachers due to these mandates.

Yours sincerely,

Rebecca Smiley